

# HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER "NEWS"

57 Hartford Street -- Phone: 863-2507 -- Email: [hszc108@yahoo.com](mailto:hszc108@yahoo.com) -- Website: [www.hszc.org](http://www.hszc.org) -- June, 2007



## IN MEMORIAM PHILIP WHALEN June 26, 2002

Zenshin Philip Whalen, an enduring presence in the communities of poets, Zen Buddhists, and free spirits, died on the morning of June 26, at the age of 78 in San Francisco.

Born October 20, 1923 in Portland, Oregon, Whalen wrote more than 20 books of poetry and two novels. His work humanized the vast cultural, philosophical, spiritual, and historical resources he knew so intimately. Along with many friends and contemporaries (among them Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Lew Welch, Jack Kerouac, Michael McClure, Joanne Kyger, and Robert Duncan), he made a distinctive and important contribution to the contemporary literary canon. His unmistakable voice was at once whimsical and essential, elegant and guileless, reflective and wholly embodied. "Philip stories" that have emerged since his death attest to his singular character. There's the time he had a friend sing the lunch menu to him in a restaurant; how he would sit alone in the dark drinking tea and playing Scarlatti on a 5-octave Casio keyboard; and his evident joy coming up a hill with an ice cream cone or sitting down to a bowl of noodles.

In 1973, he was ordained as a Zen Buddhist priest in the Soto tradition, and received Dharma transmission in the lineage of Suzuki-roshi in 1987. In 1991, he succeeded Issan Dorsey as abbot of the Hartford Street Zen Center. His ability to touch people as a Dharma teacher came from a knack for being himself. Philip was crusty, full of contrasts, unpredictably wise. He never tried to hide himself, no matter what his mood was. He engendered trust, but not complacency. He was unconventional, but also an old school gentleman. Philip knew people intuitively. He combined acceptance with his instinct to be challenging. He encouraged right practice as a matter of how we do what we do, right here in everyday life. And he never offered easy answers. He once concluded a Dharma talk by saying "I wish I could help you, but I can't. Oh well. I wish you luck in your career in Hollywood."

Farewell, Zenshin. Your tenderness continues to touch the world, carried now in the hearts of those who were touched so tenderly by you. You are well loved because you loved so well. (*Memorial reprinted courtesy of SFZC from Sangha-e! issue #4, July, 2002 edited by Camille Cusumano and Robert Thomas. Photo is by Nancy Davis from [www.bigbridge.org](http://www.bigbridge.org).)*

### JUNE DATES TO REMEMBER

June 1	One Day Retreat
June 4	Full Moon Ceremony
June 13	Board of Directors Meeting
-> June 16	Annual Membership Meeting <-
June 21	Summer Solstice Ceremony

### Thank You's

Thanks to Revs. Laurie Schley Senauke and Tova Green for their Dharma talks. Joe McInerney and Chuck Still for sponsoring the Zazen Posture class, Richard Urban for his event on our behalf and Jacquelyn Smith for joining us from IXIA Flowers, Mimi Manning for all her efforts with event planning, and Gregory Wood from Forest Books for his gift certificate donation. Also want to wish all a happy Gay Pride day.

## Zen Talks - By Philip Whalen

Life and death. That's what it's really about. We live in the midst of dying and die in the midst of living. We go through our lives picking up all kinds of things and calling it "me." We become very fond of this creation-life and inanimate matter all glued together.

I live at the Hartford Street Zen Center. There is a hospice here for folks living with AIDS. Everyone is perishing slowly. I can understand a little bit about what they are going through-that the end is not far away-because I am not well myself. Guys who are there and terribly ill are alive and know what is happening-that it's the end of the moving, that if you stop moving you're dead.

It's very real when we watch friends fade and perish. Very difficult because we want to keep things as they are. But unless you experience your own death-you are lost. Really get close to it. What we are actually doing is dying all the time. Dying is an action. Ask, "Who is living? Who is dying?" And when you go to the zendo ask, "Why am I here?"

The business of "just sitting" is very difficult. Zen wants you to rip yourself to pieces. We sit down, fold our legs and watch breath. Sit on a cushion being bored stiff. Then our minds start flashing ugly pictures, sad feelings, weird ideas, and our knees hurt. We are attacking the structure of the personality, the casing, so we get distracted from what practice is about.

What are the reasons why we do zazen? The reason is that we are greedy for satori, for enlightenment and for friends to say, "Hey I couldn't do that!" Keep asking: "What is it I am doing? What am I responding to? How am I acting with others and how do they act with me?" All we know is mush-a gray field where we try to get away or closer. All we may have learned through sitting is to handle our own intolerance or impatience. But in the life of Zen practice you shouldn't come out alive.

One of the most destructive things about Zen is the relationship between teacher and student. First, finding a teacher to work with is difficult, then hanging out with a Zen teacher is complicated and peculiar, like getting radiation burn. I remember the worst thing my teacher, Baker Roshi ever said to me. It was at Tassajara, dokusan, and he told me, "You're mean to people." He didn't elaborate.

I was destroyed. People at different times in my life have told me I'm scary, but it's in the eye of the beholder. When angry I make myself ridiculous and jump up and down, but not to intentionally scare. Usually I'm frightened and upset so I holler and yell. It's difficult to get used to one's own failure to control the temper, but anger is a state of mind that doesn't last, it goes away and shouldn't frighten us.

I got into this industry because I wanted to find out, "What is life about? What does it mean?" And I still don't know. But the teacher is a good Buddhist friend who helps you see where you're at and what's happening. We have to do our own shining, polishing and cleaning, then we need to check it out with someone who sees the process.

You go to your little zafu and all of a sudden the heavens open, ears smoke, eye balls spin, and belly button vibrates - "I got the answer! Been broken free!" You run off to the teacher who says, "Oh that's nice, now go mow the lawn." And you can see that we have fits of elation (and anger) and break through the veil, but of course the veil comes back when we look the other way.



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In my opinion, the Zen industry is about the teacher-student relationship, about forging a new relationship with the self, and about keeping trying to see what this kensho business is about. Until one finds out "what is" etc., you are not much good to anyone else. People need to sit down, that is my program, sit down and stay there until you find out, "Why born? Why die? What does the predicament of being in the body mean? What does, "Beyond the physical body" mean? Can't be "out" until thoroughly "in" - the "inness and outness" thing. And how to do laundry? I got a whole lot of dead underwear waiting in the washer upstairs.

At the end of it all, all we have is this funny Zen Buddhist practice, which is no more than telling you to please sit down over there, put your feet up in your lap, hold your hands in a certain way, keep your back straight and breathe. Then you go on from there. Just things as it is. What we all are. And we are all agreed that we want to sit and I am here to help you however I can - to teach you and do individual interviews with you, and if you want any kind of initiation or ordination, I can do that too.

The thing that I hope is that folks continue with their practice, continue to figure out how to work with it, how to absorb it into their own body and mind, into their own being. This is not a college course, it's a living proposition, here for you to use, to dive into and soak yourself in. What happens next is your own business, and with any luck at all it is also Buddha's business.

*(Talk excerpts by Zenshin Philip Whalen are from the HSZC newsletters, 1996 and 1997 and found on [purifymind.com](http://purifymind.com).)*

## News Items and Upcoming Events

- SAVE the DATE: September 8th, 2007 for our 25th Anniversary Fundraiser with Special Guests
- Our JULY Event is MALA-MAKING with MYO. Details to follow.
- HAPPY BIRTHDAY to our Newsletter Staff, Jennifer Birkett, Steve Fricke and Jim Shalkham as this edition marks the 1-year anniversary of the HSZC "NEWS"
- Congratulations to Joe McNerney on his Jukai, June 9th with Myo.

## NEW BOOKS ABOUT PHILIP

- From an announcement of Michael Rothenberg's new book, **Unhurried Vision**, about Philip's poetry:

Bald and pink and great / This is a man you could love /  
And the poetry he makes / can jump out the window /  
and get away fast.

- An excerpt from David Schneider's upcoming book, **Side Effect, The Philip Whalen Diaries**:

"So, some years ago, I kept a journal."

"Uh huh."

"And this journal well, was, kind of like focused on you. I mean on things you and I did together."

"Uh huh."

"And like, now, it's become this sort of *thing*. At least for me. Maybe one day I'll publish it..."

"Uh huh...."

Long, long silence.

"Well, Dave, there isn't really anything I can do about it NOW, is there?"

He growled, but I felt he was secretly pleased. Some years after that I mentioned it to him again, but he waved it off, as if it were already understood. *Fait accompli*.

## LICK OF RASPBERRY ICE CREAM SNATCHED FROM CREMATORY FLAME

*in memoriam zenshin ryufu philip whalen samadhi gate*

empty wrapper  
his favorite incense  
still fragrant  
the great matter  
body laid out in zen priest's robes  
"like a gigantic cicada"  
sung itself utterly out  
yet his big heart  
how still so warm



the heat  
a mere cloud wisp in blue sky  
a slight migraine

the heat :  
branches rocking lazily.  
listless leaves quavering.

the heat -  
taking tiny steps,  
licking a popsicle

the foot of mt. tam  
dips its toes in the water ;  
the september heat

at the foot of mt. tam  
young white heron tiptoes on ...  
the still reflections

Gary Gach wrote this elegy, in his words, for "Zenshin Ryufu Philip Whalen, of blessed bald head in nirvana now." (See [www.mcclure-manzarek.com/gach.html](http://www.mcclure-manzarek.com/gach.html)).

**ZAZEN POSTURE: YOGIC TOOLS FOR COMFORTABLE SITTING**  
with Shosan Victoria Austin, Sunday June 10th (noon-2pm)

How do I sit comfortably with the body I have? How about pain? What is constructive, and what is damaging? What do I do with my breathing? Is zazen posture meant for people of today? In this workshop, Victoria will work with participants in a group and one-on-one to address people's issues with the yoga of the zazen posture.

Shosan Victoria Austin is a priest and Dharma teacher at SFZC as well as a certified Iyengar yoga teacher with 23 years teaching experience, she offers her knowledge of both Zen and yoga practices to shed light on the yogic foundation of zazen.

Suggested dana for Hartford Street Zen Center members is \$10 (non-members, \$15). Questions and registration, please call Julia Ten Eyck at 415-812-6089 or HSZC at 415-863-2507. Thanks.

## Excerpt from Rev. Myo's talk for Philip's Interment

In a little while, we'll have a ceremony in the backyard for the late Abbot Zen Heart Dragon Wind. I believe he studied closely the teaching that "the elbow does not bend outwards." This is a very strict teaching. In Zenshin's case, he was quite sick and in a way that can be of great assistance to practice because it is a strict situation from which there is no escape. And a teaching such as this is in front of our faces the whole time, leaving no loop holes and no nest to hide in. (From HSZC Newsletter 2002)